



Published on *Edutopia* (<http://www.edutopia.org>)

[Home](#) > [Blogs](#) > [Elena Aguilar's blog](#) > Four Conditions Essential for Instructional Coaching to Work

---

# Four Conditions Essential for Instructional Coaching to Work

By *Elena Aguilar*

Created 2011-05-20 07:44

By [Elena Aguilar](#) [1]

5/20/11

Blogger and former teacher Elena Aguilar describes four conditions she considers essential in order for instructional coaching to work at a school.

RSS

Published to RSS

2011-05-20 07

Special Options

5

No

Off

off

My [last post](#) [2] was also about instructional coaching and I started it off by stating that in order for instructional coaching to work, the conditions must be right. A reader asked, in the comments, what exactly are those *conditions* and how do you know if they're right?

At any school, each condition is probably in some state of development; you want to get a sense of where a school is in each area and then evaluate the overall picture. So here are four conditions that a prospective instructional coach might want to assess:

**Condition #1: School culture.** For a coach to effectively partner with teachers and support them in developing their practice, the school culture needs to be oriented towards growth and improvement. Teachers, as well as administrators, need to see themselves as learners, eager and capable of improving their practice when given support. In order to assess a school's culture, it can help to attend staff meetings and talk to individuals, listening for the overall tone of how challenges are approached. You want to hear a dominant message that the staff feels that the problems are within their sphere of influence, that they have the power to improve the problems.

If challenges are seen along the lines of: "these kids don't behave well, don't speak English, come from broken homes, don't bring their homework," the school's culture is not at a place where coaching can easily take root. Shifting a culture from this place will take a team lead by a strong leader.

**Condition #2: Structures for collaboration.** For coaching to be effective, a school needs to have established time and structures for collaboration. Coaches usually work with teachers individually as well as with teams

of teachers, and in fact, research has shown that when coaches work with teams there is a greater impact on teacher practice. Teachers need to be interested in and willing to work together; their doors need to be wide open, or at least cracked. Coaching can't be effective in isolation -- it must be nestled within other learning structures such as inquiry teams or professional learning communities that are guided and rigorous.

**Condition #3: The principal's view of coaching.** In order for coaching to be effective, a coach needs a close partnership with the principal. He must see you as someone to collaborate with; he must also have a fairly clear vision of what a coach does. If you're considering a coaching position, talk to the principal and ask about his vision for coaching. What does he expect you'll be able to do in a year? What will be your roles and responsibilities? How will your work be focused and what will you be accountable for? How does he intend to work with you and support you? Does he see you as a savior, able to transform mediocre teaching practice overnight? Does he intend to deploy you or will you work together to determine how you'll coach, whom you'll coach, and what will be expected?

You want to get an overall sense of what the principal knows and understands about coaching and how he intends to utilize you. It's critical to remember that coaching can't be mandated -- so listen for any indicators that this might be the plan. You also want to get a sense of how the principal plans on bringing you into the role -- are teachers aware that a coach might come on board? How do they feel about that? Are they participating in the selection process? Does the principal anticipate pushback to coaching? How will he negotiate that? If you're considering taking a coaching job at a site, be sure to have a number of in-depth conversations with the principal. You need to feel that you can work closely and well with that leader.

**Condition #4: Professional development for coaches.** Perhaps the most critical condition for coaching to work is that an organization sees itself as a place where everyone is a learner. So if you're considering an instructional coaching job, inquire about the opportunities you'll have for your own professional development. This is absolutely essential to your effectiveness, as well as health and sanity. You will desperately need a place where you can be a learner and colleagues with whom you can discuss the challenges you're facing. You might need to set up these structures yourself -- but you need to have a sense of whether you can do this.

Are there other coaches in the school or in the district? Are there networks or professional learning communities of coaches that you can hook into? Or can you imagine ways that you can facilitate your own learning by reading books, examining your practice, and attending trainings? The impact you have on teachers will be many times greater if you are learning about your practice while coaching.

Although these conditions may not be entirely present in a school, it's critical that they exist to some degree. If one of these conditions is completely missing, coaching can be very challenging.

[Education Culture](#)   [Teacher Development](#)   [Teacher Development](#)

- [EDUTOPIA](#)
- WHAT WORKS IN EDUCATION
- © 2011 The George Lucas Educational Foundation
- All rights reserved.

---

**Source URL:** <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/four-conditions-instructional-coaching-elena-aguilar>

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.edutopia.org/user/80>

[2] <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/instructional-coach-job-consider-elena-aguilar>